



TESOL Connections

Keeping English language professionals connected

TESOL Board Connect: Recovery, Discovery, and Moving Forward

by [Joyce Kling](#)

Transition offers us a time to reflect. So, as my term as TESOL president comes to an end, I would like to take this opportunity to share some thoughts about the joint accomplishments and goals of my colleagues on the board of directors, our executive director Amber Kelleher, the TESOL staff, and the extensive range of volunteers around the world—and the work of our association.

Every 3 years, the board of directors revisits the mission and vision of the association and sets a course. Last year was one of these years. In the fall of 2022, the board ratified a new strategic plan, or more accurately, the [TESOL Strategic Direction](#). In an innovative fashion, this agile framework for 2023–2025 was built through open discussion with TESOL directors, volunteer leaders, and members. It includes eight overarching priorities:



Figure 1. 2023–2025 TESOL Strategic Direction priorities.

Over the years, with the development of TESOL's strategic plan, our mission statement has been edited and amended, but the focus has remained consistent. However, our approach is not just old wine in new bottles. On the contrary, through our activities, we address contemporary issues and continue to strive for greater diversity, equity, inclusion, and access for both our members and our constituents. Our priorities drive all our activities and initiatives. Therefore, in developing the strategic direction, the directors also revisited TESOL's mission statement. As a group, the board has emphasized the need for the ever-expanding global perspective required of English language teaching (ELT) professionals and the need to advance “professional expertise in English language teaching to speakers of other languages in multilingual contexts worldwide through professional learning, research, standards, and advocacy.” How we achieve our mission has always been a key challenge at all levels of the association.

My reflections on my own experience as a TESOL volunteer leader, long before I was on the board of directors, reminded me of a previous approach to meet this challenge.

Just over 20 years ago, I served as chair of the then board standing committee on sociopolitical concerns (SCC). At the time, a standing committee was similar in nature to our current professional councils—a group of volunteers assembled by the executive committee (president-elect, president, past president, and executive director) who worked to support the board and the association. The SCC had had a charge to uphold the elements of the association’s mission and focus on fostering effective communication in diverse settings while respecting individuals’ language rights. In reviewing documents from that time, I came across a letter I had written to interest sections leaders, as well as TESOL members at large. In 2002, the world had only just begun to interact by email, and the opportunity to reach out quickly to all our members was a fantastic opportunity. Thus, with great enthusiasm, I sent a message on behalf of the SCC requesting input for the committee’s agenda. In reviewing the letter recently, I realized that the content of the letter is as relevant now as it was then. What made this message noteworthy to me was a list of actions included that the SCC members were charged with to successfully meet their goal, namely to “listen, give voice, educate, link, activate, and provoke thought.”

Though the SCC has long been dismantled, not to mention board standing committees overall, the mandate of the SCC thrives within TESOL and has grown and developed into a broad-based platform and focal point in our mission. The association has expanded its outreach and works to advocate for our stakeholders around the world. The past year has been one of recovery and discovery. Political unrest and social inequity, not to mention the lingering remnants of the pandemic, have challenged all of us at every turn (personally and professionally).

With this in mind, at each of our virtual events, TESOL leaders and staff have invited members to share their ideas of paths for moving forward. For example, at TESOL ELevate 2022, our virtual online event for primary and secondary school teachers, TESOL’s director of advocacy and public policy, Jeff Hutcheson, reached out to attendees and asked them to put into words who or what they advocate for in their work. The responses spanned from advocating for students to be taught life skills, like leadership, communication, and critical thinking, to promoting job opportunities for nonnative-English-speaking colleagues at local institutions. Discussions at the event resulted in the word cloud shown in Figure 2; the sentiments mirror the aforementioned SCC actions from 2002, with terms like *support*, *respect*, *action*, and *empowerment* at the center.

WHAT DOES ADVOCACY MEAN TO YOU?



Figure 2. TESOL ELevate 2022 word cloud.

This early career member discussion at this event was followed up with a more formal presentation of TESOL's advocacy work for the board of directors. In his presentation to the board, Jeff outlined the activities and workshops he has been developing, building on the work of previous TESOL colleagues. The ensuing discussion has been simultaneously exhilarating and challenging.

All this leads my thoughts back to the SCC letter and the committee's charge. The designated charge, though pertinent to the work of the former standing committee, is more important than ever in 2023. Thus, regardless of your professional experience or your position in the association, I invite you to consider an updated edition of this call to action for advocating in our field:

- **Listen:** Serve as ears for all ELT stakeholders and our association.
- **Give voice:** Ensure a variety of voices are both heard and have opportunities to be heard.
- **Educate:** Define, frame, prioritize, and share issues at all levels of the association.
- **Link:** Act as a communication bridge, connecting voices and members and groups with like or related concerns.
- **Activate:** Facilitate members' ability to take action through open channels of communication.
- **Provoke thought:** Move members and leaders to weigh and consider issues from new and different angles.

These action points link directly to our strategic direction and our eight key priorities. Though we may not always meet our goals, these points provide us with a tools for the future. Even more, I believe these highlight the timeless nature of our work.

As I transition to the rank of TESOL past president, I anticipate a range of future opportunities to advocate for and support TESOL's members around the globe. I would like to

thank you all for electing me to serve as president for 2022–2023. In the coming year and beyond, I look forward to TESOL’s future initiatives and opportunities to listen, give voice, educate, link, activate, and provoke thought.

Joyce Kling, PhD, is a senior lecturer at Lund University in Sweden, where she teaches second language teacher education courses to preservice and in-service teachers. Over the course of her career, she has worked as an English language ESL and EFL teacher, program director and administrator, teacher trainer, researcher, materials developer, author, and consultant. Her research interests include English as medium of instruction (EMI), teacher cognition, and language testing and assessment. Her work appears in TESOL Quarterly, Journal of English-Medium Instruction, as well as several edited volumes and monographs. The most recent publication is a coauthored monograph entitled *The Evolution of EMI Research in European Higher Education* (2022, Routledge). She is currently TESOL International Association president (2022–2023).